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Should More People Read the Bible?

A radio discussion over WGN and the Mutual Broadcasting System

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Should More People Read the Bible?

MR. McBURNEY: Gentlemen, those of us associated with the Reviewing Stand have noted, or think we have at least, a remarkable interest in religious, ethical and moral questions in recent years, more especially since World War II. Do you think this interest really exists, Dr. Koller?

Interest in Religion

DR. KOLLER: I think undoubtedly religion is in the news as never before in our lifetime. This increase of interest is evident from the greatly increased emphasis upon religion in newspapers, magazines and radio programs, and by the multiplication of religious books, and the wide reception which is given them these days. It is evident also in the readiness with which people generally, and young people in particular, profess belief in a divine Providence. We can remember the time when it was fashionable to be skeptical or unbelieving; now it is fashionable to believe.

MR. McBURNEY: Has that been your experience, Rabbi Hertz?

RABBI HERTZ: Yes, it has. As a Chaplain in the Army, I found a widespread interest in religion among the troops of our Armed Forces. I have seen it too in the college classrooms and in the bull sessions that students have in their dormitories, as well as, of course, in the formal courses on religion and literature which are becoming very popular in the colleges and universities of our country.

FATHER BARNABAS MARY: I agree with Dr. Koller and Rabbi Hertz there is a gratifying revival of interest in things of a religious nature, particularly in those matters that are easy of practice. We know religion has to plunge its roots deeper than simply in emotional life and cultural expansion. It must go deep into men's minds and wills. I wonder whether we can be so sanguine in our own age.

Certainly we know, if anything, a greater uncertainty about God, the true God as revealed in the Scriptures. We know of the attack on the sanctity and stability of family life. We know of the vital attack on morality and integrity in public life. It makes us wonder if the religious revival is plunging its roots deep into man's own being. That is the pertinence of the question today. More people should read the Bible, not only to carry on the great religious revival of interest, but plunging deep into what is most important, our own minds and wills.

RABBI HERTZ: The times are crying out for the truths of religion. Despite the high prosperity of our time, the people are living under the shadow of fear. Fear of war, insecurity, inflation, old age, unemployment, ill health, and they are seeking religion to help master those fears.

DR. KOLLER: I share with Father Barnabas Mary the fear that this interest which is so widespread may be too superficial to do us much good unless we can manage somehow to strike deeper roots for it.

'Strengthen Intellect and Will'

FATHER BARNABAS MARY: As Rabbi has pointed out, that is exactly what God is providing for now. May I present the figure Moses gave his people, God-like, an eagle plunged Israel from the nest to accustom it to walk in its life, gave the uprush of air to force the development of its wings. To our own day, these problems have arisen under God's Providence, and our wings of intellect and will can be strengthened to walk in the will of God.

RABBI HERTZ: To understand the widespread interest in religious concerns, you have to realize the confusion that people are living in. People know more and more these days about

less and less. This is an age of specialization. People seek answers to fundamental and basic human questions. What we live with is clear nowadays—gadgets, inventions, comforts, conveniences; but what we live for is often unclear and at times unwise.

FATHER BARNABAS MARY: Don't you think that is the reason we have to go deeper into the Bible so these minds of ours and wills of ours can be directed along fundamental lines so much deeper than just the horizontal plane that most of us have?

RABBI HERTZ: People are hungering for spiritual inspiration and people are becoming aware of the appalling spiritual illiteracy of our times.

MR. McBURNEY: I know you men are agreed in your answer to our question, "Should more people read the Bible." I know you think more people should read the Bible, but why?

Author-Content-Style

FATHER BARNABAS MARY: You can sum up the reason under three heads: the author of the Bible, its content, and third its style. Its author is God. That is the wonder of the letter coming from our Father in Heaven. Like the young lads in Korea devour the letters from home, we too, should be avid in studying the message God sent us from His Heavenly Home. In content, you can take the Bible and every department of your life is covered. It tells you all about God and truly, our Father planned for each one of us to have Providence reach end to end. Sweetly, it tells us about ourselves. We are precious in His eyes. We are His children. At the same time, we have a tremendous responsibility to God to do His will and carry out the plan as He has mapped it out for us, to find out what it is God wants us to do and do it. It gives us a clear insight in our dealings with one another, makes us realize all men are truly children of God, colored and white and Protestant and Jew and Catholic, we are all truly children of God and bound together

by the most strong claims of justice and charity. I would add thirdly, the very style recommends the Bible. It is written in a language even a child can understand. Its pages are splashed with colors and God's truth is there, manifest to us in living object lessons. We can see and feel in its pages what God can do in the lives of men and women like ourselves when our lives are surrendered to Him. I would say to sum it all up, God is author, and then content, and finally, the style is the compelling reason why we should go deep in the study of the Sacred Scriptures.

DR. KOLLER: This renewal of religion seems really to record adversity. During the great depression about thirty years ago, people were groping for stability in what seemed a tottering world. Some of this interest today may be fox-hole religion brought home by the boys from the war. Most of all, it seems due to the threat of catastrophe which hovers over the world today, and the realization that human ingenuity cannot save us. Our help must come from above.

'Live By It'

RABBI HERTZ: When you ask the question, "Should more people read the Bible," the answer of course is "yes," but it isn't enough to own the Bible. We need to be owned by it. It isn't enough to take pride in how many copies we buy and sell. The Bible is still the world's best seller. It will always be that, but we need to read it and understand it and appreciate it and live by it. Goethe was right when he said, "The Bible grows more beautiful as we grow in our understanding of it." The best thing that you can do for the Bible is to let the Bible do its best for you, and the only Bible we need to own is the one that we have made our very own.

MR. McBURNEY: What can the Bible do for you?

RABBI HERTZ: The Bible can do a great many things. If a person were to ask me, "Rabbi, what would regular reading of the Bible do for me?" I think I would say something like

this: Regular reading of the Bible will give you poise, quietness of spirit, a time for meditation and reflection, the kind of tranquility we all need in these hectic, hurly-burly days. It will help you cultivate the serene spirit, and that is a priceless boon these days. It will give you insight into human personality. The Bible is full of rare insights into human nature. From Joseph and Saul and David, from Ruth and Esther and Job, you will learn to understand your fellow man.

MR. McBURNEY: About those insights, Rabbi, are the kind of personal insights you get from the Bible likely to be applicable in this year of our Lord?

Human Beings and Situations

RABBI HERTZ: The Bible is full of human situations. People are human beings in the Bible and they speak of human situations. People are the same today as they were 3000 years ago.

FATHER BARNABAS MARY: But, Rabbi, really to appreciate what you are saying and to admit its logic, don't we have to presume that people are approaching the Bible with a definite spirit of acceptance? In other words, they see in the Bible something more than just a human book? They see a work that has truly come from God, otherwise how could it produce the wonderful effect of which you are speaking? They can find the basic reason why it produces a tremendous change in man's soul.

RABBI HERTZ: Regular reading of the Bible gives the person a new reverence for life. The Book of Psalms exhals the reverence for life as no other human book does. A person who reads the Bible regularly learns the vocabulary of religion. The Bible is the textbook of religion and helps a person understand his own religion as well as that of his neighbor. Of course, I, as a Jew and as a Rabbi, know that regular reading of the Bible for my people teaches them the origins of Judaism, and the Jewish people, our religion, our history, our

past. A person listening to this broadcast who may wonder what regular reading of the Bible will do for him will realize that he will discover a passion for ethical living. You can't read the Prophets, for example, without becoming inflamed with zeal for social justice and personal righteousness. And of course, your general cultural background is vastly improved. The Bible is part of the classics of man. It stands at the top of the list of Great Books. I believe you cannot be an educated or cultured person without a knowledge of the Bible.

'Must Know Him'

DR. KOLLER: I should like to add if it is to be well with us in the world in which we live, we must come to terms with God, the creator and sovereign of this universe. Without His favor and help, we are undone, and if we are to have His blessing, we must know Him, we must respond to Him in obedience and devotion. To this end we have the Bible, the Holy Scriptures, inspired of God and designed to show man the way to fellowship with Him and with the expediency of His divine favor.

RABBI HERTZ: I, too, as a religious leader, share the same sense of commitment to God. A person reading the Bible most important of all, finds a sure faith in God, in the oneness and righteousness of God, in the unending inspiration of God, in the continuance of revelation of God's will through the still, small voice within each person of the human family.

FATHER BARNABAS MARY: Through all this, must we not emphasize that the reasons for the wonderful merits of Bible reading are underlined in the fundamental fact it comes from God? Human beings like ourselves are in its composition, but it is He who has illumined and directed our minds to grasp those thoughts. Isn't that the fundamental reason for the glory of Bible reading? We come into contact with God's own message that comes to us through the lips of human beings like ourselves for the direction of our own life so that message is

divine in its origin, divine in its content and really and truly one message and the same message for all.

MR. McBURNEY: People are enormously complex. They live in all kinds of environments, they suffer all sorts of vicissitudes. Some of them read the Bible and some of them don't read the Bible. I wonder if we couldn't be more specific about this. What kind of help, specifically can people get from reading the Bible? Take a man who is suffering, who is sick, what can he get out of it, Father?

'Vertical Not Horizontal'

FATHER BARNABAS MARY: I would take basically every one in general before we go into the particular group. For every one in general, it helps you to put first things first, a hierarchy of values in your life. God first. It helps you to belong to life vertically rather than horizontally. We are living too horizontally, looking around us on a level with ourselves, losing sight of the fact that there is a vertical line that binds us to God—we are losing these souls of ours and there is nothing to be given in exchange with these souls. That is the fundamental, basic reason for Bible reading for everyone, a true sense of value that puts God first as God should be first.

MR. McBURNEY: I don't mean to be facetious, but I am thinking about the person who is horizontal. What kind of help can he get out of the Bible?

FATHER BARNABAS MARY: The person living horizontally can get a world of good from the Bible. First of all, insofar as the Bible teaches him to cease living horizontally and begin to live vertically. In his problems, he can get great good as he pages through the Sacred Scriptures, the story of men like himself, Jeremiah and Job, go through the sufferings, and in surrender to God at least find peace. In those golden pages of the New Testament, he sees how God's own Son had to go through the same way we are walking and did so to prove His love for us. There comes direction for his life in the sense that

after this battle and this struggle is over there will be a reward waiting for him which his eye has not seen, nor ear yet heard, nor even entered our minds to conceive, for God has prepared for those who do walk in the way He has traced.

DR. KOLLER: I can say "Amen" to all of that. To every life there come crises in which we instinctively reach up and in the extreme cry out, "O, God!" If we have a growing knowledge of the Bible, we have a growing reservoir from which to draw in time of need. As we walk in the light of the Scriptures, we prove for ourselves the path of the just is as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. The Bible points the way to national, as well as personal well being. A widespread revival of Bible reading would produce accordingly, a revival of Godliness and integrity, the result of which would be by the grace of God, clean government, national security, and a glow of national well being such as our generation has never known.

Natural Law

FATHER BARNABAS MARY: Dr. Koller, aren't you touching upon what is a fundamental thing in the composition of the Bible? In the Bible we are not only dealing with the positive law God has revealed by word of mouth, we are dealing with that fundamental, natural law written in every man's heart so that the Bible's directives really and truly have a valid claim on every human heart. The Bible translates into words the fundamental law God wrote upon our hearts in our creation. Here we begin to see a reason for that justice and that charity that binds all men together, even though these same men may be at variance on certain aspects.

RABBI HERTZ: The Bible can help people facing all kinds of situations in life in every possible way. There is an appropriate Biblical portion for every occasion of life—joy, sorrow, depression or exhalation, when things go wrong, when life looks dark, when loneliness overpowers us. A person who is suffering has often asked him-

self, "Oh, why do righteous people suffer? How can a good God permit this, a God of love and kindness?" Let him turn to the Book of Job for some profound answers, or if a person is troubled or discouraged, let him open the Book of Psalms and find there that he does not stand alone, that he has God's help. He finds a key to courage and successful living in the Psalms.

MR. McBURNEY: You men seem to be saying we should turn to the Bible when we are ill, suffering, when we are in distress. Perhaps you have done so under the pressure of my questioning. How about the millions of healthy, happy, prosperous people? Do they have any need for the Bible, Father?

FATHER BARNABAS MARY: Probably they need the Bible more than anyone else does. There is danger that in prosperity we are apt to lose our sense of perspective. We are apt to begin to live as though this life was the end-all, the be-all of everything, forgetting there is something beyond. In the Bible you are told to lift up your eyes. We are not here as a lasting city. There is one to come. The Bible mentions that the prosperous must keep their feet solidly on the rock of God and that this is a testing time to get us ready for the next.

Theme of Humility

RABBI HERTZ: The great lesson of the Bible is the theme of humility. A person who reads the Bible who is healthy and prosperous has to remember that the God who gives can also take away, and when He takes away, this person should not have cause to reproach himself that he has not justly or wisely used the gifts of Almighty Providence.

MR. McBURNEY: If I may interrupt, Rabbi Hertz, you have made oblique remarks or references to public morality in relation to the Bible. Does the Bible have anything to say about that?

RABBI HERTZ: The Bible has plenty to say about public morality. We

read of the ancient prophets 3000 years ago when there was a trying age of disillusionment and corruption, venal men in high places using their positions in those days to carry personal fame and gain through secret bribery and double promises, and yet the voices of Amos and Isaiah, Micah and Jeremiah were not silent. They rose up and spoke out to each man a kind of vision to perceive wrong, courage to face up to injustice, truth to unmask deceit, integrity to preserve honor, loyalty to serve God. It was Amos in particular who told the people of Israel the time would soon come when there would be famine in the land, a famine not of bread, but a famine of hearing the word of the Lord. That is what is happening today. People are hungering for a return of decency and morality, in public affairs and in private thinking as well. The masses of plain people, the citizens, were revolted by the television expose of the Costellos and the Adonises and the Anastasias. The thousands of indignant citizens took the trouble to write letters to their Congressmen and editors. The conversation on every street corner, at every dinner table raised the question, "Isn't it terrible? Can't something be done about it?" I believe the slumbering consciousness of America is awakening. Our people want to hear the word of decency and morality again, the word of ethics and of right conduct. People want to hear the word of God again and that is why they are turning to the Bible.

Spiritual Reserves

DR. KOLLER: I would add to what has already been said so well. The Bible is more than a place of refuge when we are in trouble, suffering, or when public morals have gone wrong. I believe we need it all the while to keep us in the light and walking straight. It is to be remembered that people are not always going to be healthy and happy and prosperous, and they need to lay up spiritual reserves for the time when there is illness and sorrow and adversity. As a people, we are not always going to be on a righteous level. I think that

has been well emphasized and we need this light all the time, all the time, no matter what our momentary condition may be spiritually, privately or as a people.

FATHER BARNABAS MARY: I would like to comment on that observation Rabbi just made. I think the Bible in public life was well summarized in the recent Letters of the Bishops of the United States. They clearly asserted that men in public life are as vitally bound by the laws of morality as men in private life. There can be no separation between public and private morality. The Bible is clear on this. It is necessary to point out for all people, whether they accept the Bible or not, these messages of the Prophets on social integrity and political integrity bind all men, because they go deeper than the positive, revealed law of God, right down to the natural law inherent in every man's soul. Therefore, on that basis of natural law, these Biblical tenets are built up and expressed in divine language, but the principles themselves, because they are rooted in human nature, bind all, whether they accept the Bible or not. That is one of the wonderful things about the recent encyclical of the Pope, all men rest not on God's positive revealed law, but rest on the fundamental natural law of charity and justice that binds all of them.

Public Morality

RABBI HERTZ: That is where we all agree. I want to say this, here we sit at this round table, Catholic, Protestant and Jew, each of us has our own respective acts and convictions and yet all of us as citizens tell of the deep impulse of these religious convictions. We have a tremendous opportunity. If the voice of the churches and the synagogues of America were to rise up in protest, with righteous indignation, against the kind of public morality and lack of integrity in our government on all levels, this great voice for good could awaken what I call the slumbering consciousness of America. We would really get some good out of the message of religion.

FATHER BARNABAS MARY: We would be justified in that. We would be appealing to the fundamental natural law that binds all men, received as a divine expression in the Scriptures.

RABBI HERTZ: The Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man teaches us if we don't act as brothers, the time will soon come when something else will take its place. It is religion or else.

FATHER BARNABAS MARY: That is exactly the present problem. Whether colored or Jew or white or Protestant or Catholic, we are all bound together equally and justly, and charity is rooted in our very nature, finding expression in the Bible.

MR. McBURNEY: I would like to underline what Rabbi Hertz has said and direct this question to you, Dr. Koller. Here we sit as Protestant, Catholic and Jew, representing an enormous influence in our churches and our synagogues and great universities. We are aware of this question of public morality. Why can't we raise our voice in unison and do something about it?

'Not Hearers Only'

DR. KOLLER: The Bible reminds us that we are to be doers of the Word, and not hearers only. As a matter of fact, if there is not the sincere intent of responding to that which we read in the heart, there is little or no value in reading anyhow. He that will shall know, the other will not get the message.

FATHER BARNABAS MARY: One remark I would like to make. We are here presuming everyone is going to get one and the same message from the Bible. Such is not the case. It comes down to a fundamental question, do we need help in reading the Bible? There is something in the Bible we ought to understand. There is much we can appreciate. At the same time, there are fundamental differences in our interpretation of the Bible. Certainly we have to look to

that interpretation of the Biblical text. Its author is God who has also given us an institution in the church to which He has committed the custodian and the interpretation of this text. It is important we realize there is

always a need for this help in our interpretation if we are to come to the same message . . .

ANNOUNCER: I am sorry to interrupt but our time is up.



Suggested Reading



Compiled by William Huff,
and M. Helen Perkins, Reference Department,
Deering Library, Northwestern University.

BOWIE, WALTER RUSSELL. *Story of the Bible*. Abingdon-Cokesbury, Nashville, 1949.

CLINTON, KENNETH. *Let's Read the Bible*. Macmillan, New York, 1950.

A recognition of the small number of persons who read the Bible, with reasons for the neglect, along with suggestions for a renewal of interest in its reading.

CRONBACH, ABRAHAM. *The Bible and Our Social Outlook*. Riverdale Press, Cincinnati, 1941.

A professor of social studies at Hebrew Union College outlines what we may gain by reading the Bible.

CURRY, BRUCE. *The Bible and the Quest of Life*. Oxford University Press, New York, 1933.

A compilation of fifty-two studies in the contribution of the Bible to thought and life with notes and references to Biblical passages.

FILLIOM, L. CLAUDE. *The Study of the Bible*. F. J. Kenedy, New York, 1926.

This work urges to a greater love of the Sacred Scripture; it also contributes valuable directives for an intelligent appreciation of the Bible on the part of those who are beginning study for the ministry.

FREEHOF, SOLOMON B. *Preface to Scripture*. Union of American Hebrew Congregations, Cincinnati, 1950.

This book forms a splendid introduction to the lay reader and also gives selections from Scripture for appropriate occasions.

GAUL, CYRIL. *Rome and the Study of the Scripture*. Grail Publications, St. Meinrad, Indiana, 1946.

This collection of Papal Enactments contains the classic encyclical letters of Pope Leo XIII, Benedict XV, Pius XII on the promotion of Bible reading.

GOLDMAN, SOLOMON. *Book of Books: an Introduction*. Harper, New York, 1948.

The introductory volume to a projected series of thirteen volumes called *Book of Human Destiny*, this volume presents fundamental Hebrew ideas and an anthology of allusions drawn from general literature.

HARKNESS, GEORGIA. *The Gospel and Our World*. Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, New York, 1949.

The churches of America are failing to present the claims of the Christian faith in meaningful terms to the common man.

POPE, HUGH. *The Catholic Church and the Bible*. Macmillan, New York, 1929.
Historical study on devotion to the Bible through the ages.

SPOTTS, CHARLES DEWEY. *You Can Read the Bible*. Christian Education Press, Philadelphia, 1949.

WALLIS, LOUIS. *The Bible and Modern Belief*. Duke University Press, Durham, N.C., 1950.

A scientific point of view presenting the salient factors regarding the role of the Bible in our inherited cultural tradition.

WATTS, HAROLD H. *The Modern Reader's Guide to the Bible*. Harper, New York, 1949.

A guide to the reading of the Bible as literature containing two chapters of particular interest: "On Reading the Bible" and "What the Bible Is."

Christian Century 68:816-18, J1. 11, '51. "Great Time for the Preacher." E. BRUNNER.

A clergyman points out that "In such a time as this we learn again that all is transitory except the word of God in Holy Scripture which contains everything that we need and that we modern men so easily forget."

Ecumenical Review 1 no. 4:410-16, '49. "Bible as a Force for Unity." S. de DIETNICH.

The Bible will serve as a force for unity if men and nations will turn to it instead of fastening themselves to their own egocentric world.

Education 71:343-45, Feb., '51. "The Creative Use of the Bible." H. H. MEYER.

Extension of experience guided by the aspirations and spiritual achievements recorded in the Bible can serve to project the individual and society closer to the ideal self and the ideal world.

International Journal of Religious Education 27:15-16, Nov., '50. "Fresh Approach to Bible Reading." J. C. TREVER.

An outline approach to the reading of the Bible with regard to its continuity in history.

Religion in Life 20:214-224, Spring, '51. "The Bible in the World Council of Churches." C. E. WRIGHT.

An examination of the document "Guiding Principles for the Interpretation of the Bible" by a committee from the World Council of Churches.

Religion in Life 20:599-607, Autumn, '51. "The Everlasting Gospel." R. C. CHALMERS.

The reading of the Bible brings renewed hope in a world where the flesh constantly falls heir to a myriad of mental and physical assaults.

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